

1994. *Ladybirds*. New Naturalist's Series, HarperCollins, p. 93). There are several sycamores in the vicinity. Unlike most other British ladybirds, it feeds on various mildews on the leaves.

We are most grateful to the gardening staff at Buckingham Palace for noting the ladybird aggregations and drawing them to our attention, as well as for ensuring that the aggregations were not disturbed during the course of various winter gardening works taking place. We are also indebted to Dr Mike Majerus for his most helpful comments on an earlier draft of this short note and we have incorporated all of his comments where the information was available.— MARK LANE, Buckingham Palace, London SW1A 1AA and COLIN W. PLANT, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP (E-mail: Colinwplant@compuserve.com).

#### A January Spruce Carpet *Thera britannica* (Turner) (Lep.: Geometridae)

On the morning of 19 January 2000, I arrived at Highgate Wood, Middlesex (grid reference TQ 283887) to inspect the first catch of the new millennium in the moth-trap which I have run there every year, if on a somewhat irregular basis, since 1984. The disappointment of finding only one specimen soon deteriorated to self-doubt at finding nothing comparable to it in the pages of *Skinner* except a Spruce Carpet *Thera britannica*.

Since the text-books assured me that this species flies in May-June and August-September, and the larva fed up on spruces and firs in the autumn, hibernated when small, and fed up the following spring, I apologetically sent it to Colin Plant, who both reassured and surprised me, and himself, by confirming that it was, indeed, *britannica*. However, when I was reminded by Dennis Fletcher, of the Wood staff, that the Wood had, for several years, run a popular Christmas-tree recycling facility, the inexplicable suddenly became possible.

Picture a young *britannica* larva, quietly feeding on a spruce in some Christmas tree plantation, and by November or early December in hibernation. The tree is felled, and transported through various stages to a warm Yuletide household in the Highgate area. The larva naturally mistakes the central heating for the advent of spring, resumes feeding and pupates in mid to late December. Around 6 January, conscientious householders take the tree, with its unseen resident, to Highgate Wood, where it will be destined for the shredding machine.

Fortunately for this particular *britannica*, the mild weather, together with its advanced state of pupation, fortuitously mean that the adult hatches out in the depot, near where a moth trap will shortly be set, before it can be turned into compost – and the rest, as the media assure us, is history. Alas, the origin of the tree will never be known; can I count it as a Highgate Wood record?— MICHAEL HAMMERSON, 4 Bramalea Close, Highgate, London N6 4QD.